

# Effective Interviews

## INTERVIEW PLANNING FORM

*Prepare this form before each interview:*

### **PART 1: ABOUT THE POSITION / ORGANIZATION**

Description of position, skills and qualifications:

Products and services of employer:

Industry information (e.g. competitors, trends):

Organization's history:

Other information (e.g. organizational values, challenges faced):

Summary of key employer needs:

**PART II: ABOUT YOURSELF**

Skills I have that are needed for this position:

**Examples** where I demonstrated these skills:

3 - 5 key points that summarize how my skills and experience match employer's needs:

Anticipated problem areas (e.g. limited experience):

Challenges that I might face in the interview (e.g. nervousness, eye contact, disclosing information):

Questions to ask interviewer:

Other information that you want to share with an employer (e.g. personal qualities, accomplishments):

## **SOME RECOMMENDED SITES FOR COMPANY / INDUSTRY RESEARCH**

**Canada Newswire** - <http://www.newswire.ca/en/>

**Charity Village (Non-profits)** - <http://www.charityvillage.com/cv/main.asp>

**Contact Canada (Pharma & BioPharma)** - <http://www.contactcanada.com/>

**Globe Investor - Company Snapshots**

<http://www.globeinvestor.com/static/hubs/company-snapshot.html>

**Halton Region Business Directory** - <http://www.halton.ca/business/hbd/>

**Industry Canada: Company Directories**

[http://www.ic.gc.ca/epic/site/ic1.nsf/en/h\\_00070e.html?OpenDocument&](http://www.ic.gc.ca/epic/site/ic1.nsf/en/h_00070e.html?OpenDocument&)

**Information and Communications Technology Council**

<http://www.ictc-ctic.ca/en/content.aspx?id=36>

**Mississauga - Business Profiles and Facts**

<http://www.mississauga.ca/portal/business/profilefactsandmaps>

**Profit 100** - <http://list.canadianbusiness.com/rankings/profit100/2008/intro/Default.aspx>

**Service Canada Labour Market Information** - <http://www.labourmarketinformation.ca>

## **STAR - A Technique for Articulating Your Skills and Accomplishments**

- A. Choose ONE of the questions from the slide and fill in an example of a past experience using the **S.T.A.R.** method.

**Situation**

**Task**

**Actions**

**Results**

**Practice Session**

- B.** Have one partner (“the interviewer”) ask the selected question from the slide; and, using the **S.T.A.R.** method, have the other partner (“the candidate”) answer the question.
  
- C.** After “the candidate” has given his/her response, “the interviewer” should provide feedback to “the candidate” using the observer form as a guide.
  
- D.** Switch roles and repeat the process.

## OBSERVER'S FORM FOR PEER PRACTICE INTERVIEW

**1. Did the candidate:**

Y / N Shake hands firmly

Y / N Make and maintain eye contact with interviewer?

Y / N Display positive body language: smile, not fidgeting, sitting straight

Y / N Speak at an even pace (not too quickly or slowly)?

Y / N Use variety in speaking tone? (vs. monotone)

Y / N Speak too quietly?

Y / N Speak fluently (i.e. not too many pauses, ummm, difficulty finding right word)?

Y / N Provide acceptable answers to the questions? Stay on track?

Y / N Use the STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) method to identify examples of specific skills?

Y / N Was there sufficient detail in the example to illustrate the skill or the knowledge?

Y / N Give too long or too short an answer? Suggestions re: how to improve?

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Overall, what TWO areas were most impressive about the candidate's behaviour AND/OR responses in the interview?

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**2. Overall, what TWO areas would you suggest the candidate work on?**

## Types of Interview Questions

There are numerous types of questions employers could ask you in an interview. However, these questions can be categorized into three main types such as **Open-ended, Behavioural and Situational**.

**Open-ended** questions are those that do not have specific direction and cannot be answered by "yes" or "no". An example of an open-ended question is "Tell me about yourself?"

**Behavioural** questions focus on your past performance such as "Can you give an example of how you dealt with \_\_\_\_\_ in the past?" Based on the past behaviour and "proven track record", employers try to predict how effective the candidate would be in the new position.

Sometimes employers present problematic scenarios that require solutions. These are referred to as **Situational** questions. You need to demonstrate your analytical and problem solving skills in your answers.

Listed below, you will find a combination of **Open-ended, Behavioural and Situational** questions frequently asked by interviewers.

### TYPICALLY ASKED QUESTIONS

#### Your Qualifications and Experience

1. Tell me about yourself. (Open)
2. What previous experience has prepared you for the duties and responsibilities of this position?
3. Tell me about the position you had at \_\_\_\_\_. How has this prepared you for this position?
4. Describe the experience that you feel is most relevant to this position.
5. Describe a team project that you have undertaken. What was your role? What did you learn from this experience? (Behavioural)
6. You have been working on a project for over a month and are about to finish writing the report. Suddenly you realize some very important facts that should be included in this project have been overlooked. What would you do in this situation? (Situational)
7. Give an example of a time when you demonstrated creative problem solving. (Behavioural)
8. Give an example of where you have demonstrated leadership qualities.
9. You are working on a group project with your colleagues. While the deadline is getting closer, the group still cannot agree on how the project should be completed and one of the members is simply not doing his share. What would you do in this situation? (Situational)

### **Knowledge of Industry / Organization / Position**

10. Why are you interested in the industry, our company, this position? (Open)
11. A client (customer) has been using the products and services of our company (organization) for three years and noticed some changes in the way business is being conducted in our field. The client is making an inquiry about these changes. What would you tell this client? (Situational)
12. What can you contribute to our organization?
13. What questions do you have about our company?
14. What is your salary expectation?
15. What kind of references can you provide?

### **Goals / Personal Attitudes / Values**

16. What was the process you went through in deciding to leave your last position?
17. Why do you want this job? (Choose reasons relating to your professional growth or challenges) (Open)
18. What do you like best/least about your present (or last) job? Why?
19. What does taking initiative mean to you? Can you give an example where you have demonstrated your initiative? (Behavioural)
20. Is there anything you want us to know that we haven't had a chance to ask you?
21. What are your short/ long-term goals in this field?
22. How would you improve your GPA if you had a chance to do it again?
23. If I talked to your co-workers, how would they describe you?
24. You have heard that one of your clients has complained to your supervisor because he is dissatisfied with your work. What would you do in that situation? (Situational)
25. Describe a situation in which you had a disagreement with a supervisor. How was it resolved? (Behavioural)
26. How do you maintain enthusiasm on the job, despite certain aspects of the work you don't enjoy?
27. What are your strengths/weaknesses? Give an example.
28. Since you've graduated, what effort have you made to continue your learning?

***Be Specific - Give Examples To Support Your Answers!***

## Dressing for Your Interviews

The dress code for interviews can vary based on the organization. The general rule of thumb is to dress for your interview the way you would for the most important day on the job. The following are some guidelines for business formal and business casual attire. For further information and examples, please visit the Dress for Success page on the UTM Career Centre website.

### Business Formal or Business Professional

It tends towards more conservative and colours such as navy or black are appropriate. Both men and women should wear a clean, pressed, button down shirt with a collar. The shirt must be worn tucked in. Hosiery is a must for women, a tie and belt are required for men, and a jacket and closed-toed shoes are required for both.

**Clothing fit is extremely important.** If you are unsure about fit, ask a friend or family member to take a look. You don't want your suit to be too snug or too loose. Minor adjustments such as adjusting sleeve length or taking in the back seam can yield impressive results. Most shopping malls have at least one tailor shop, and many dry cleaners offer alteration services as well. Ask for a cost estimate, and be prepared to try your outfit on, including shoes. If the cost is within your budget you may just find yourself with a perfectly tailored suit!

### Business Casual

Business casual is attire that is appropriate even for a chance meeting with the CEO, or your boss. For women it means clothing such as slacks or a skirt, a blouse or shirt with a collar and closed-toe shoes. For men, business casual usually means slacks or khakis (chino-style pants), with a polo shirt, or a button down shirt with a tie but no jacket. Some sweaters are also appropriate for both men and women.

**It's also helpful to consider what business casual is NOT.**

**It is not** clothing you would wear to a club or for athletic purposes; anything that is revealing, tight, see-through, or spandex is off-limits, as are baseball hats, flip-flops, jeans, and hooded sweatshirts. Don't let the word casual mislead you. You still need to look professional.

## Other Tips

### Basics for Everyone

#### Hair

Ensure you have a well-groomed hairstyle. Do not over apply hair products such as gel, and avoid unusual styles and colours. Ensure that overall your hair is neat, clean and away from your face.

#### Deodorant, Anti-Perspirant

Ensure that you take a shower and wear deodorant or antiperspirant.

#### Perfume, Cologne, & Body Spray

Many workplaces are implementing scent-free policies to ensure a comfortable work environment for everyone. It is best to **avoid wearing cologne, perfume, or body spray fragrances** for the following reasons:

- the people you are meeting with may have allergies/sensitivities to fragrances
- you don't know how big or ventilated the space is where you will be meeting
- if you wear a scent frequently you may have become accustomed to it and not notice its strength

People may not be able to tolerate your company for very long regardless of how great you are; after you leave they may recall the scent of your perfume instead of your skills and charm. If you still choose to wear a scent, do so sparingly and ask for honest feedback on its strength before you leave the house.

#### Smoking

Don't smoke prior to your interview or event. Tobacco odours linger in your clothing and hair, as well as on your skin.

#### Breath

Make sure you have fresh breath. Do not chew gum. If you choose gum to freshen your breath get rid of it before you enter the building or meet anyone.

#### Tattoos, Piercings

If the workplace is conservative, ensure that you have no visible body art, and avoid visible piercings, including tongue rings and multiple piercings on the ears. If you must leave rings in, choose tiny un-obtrusive studs, and try to wear as few as possible. For women who wear earrings, avoid dangling or oversized earrings and stick to something small and discrete.

### **Cell Phone**

Pretend that it doesn't exist. Turn off your cell phone or place it on silent (not on vibrate) before you arrive at your event or interview. Do not place the cell phone on the table as though you are expecting a call, and do not take it out of your pocket or bag to check it. Give the other person your undivided attention. Leaving your phone in your pants pocket may cause it to fall out when you sit, so you may want to leave it in your bag or in your inner jacket pocket instead.

### **Bags, Padfolios, & Purses**

Depending on the situation, you may find that you need a place to store things that you bring with you to the interview, the meeting or event. Regardless of the event, do your best to avoid bringing a backpack; leave it in a locker or with a friend.

For both men and women, a structured bag will make a better impression than one that is wrinkled. Aim for a professional padfolio, or professional-looking tote bag such as a nice laptop bag.

For women, if you have a purse, keep it small. The purse should be large enough to hold 8.5" x 11" papers and other items, but not much larger than that. The bag should not be too colourful, flashy or intricate. Stay away from bags that are woven, knit or straw as they convey a more casual feel. Appropriate materials include leather, or fake leather, or a finely woven fabric such as microfiber.

### **Umbrella and Outerwear**

**Check the weather and be prepared.** It would be disheartening to spend so much time preparing for your meeting, only to show up in a soggy suit because you forgot an umbrella! Don't take chances with interviews and opportunities that are important to you.

You may wish to wear a coat or jacket of some sort if it's cold or raining outside. In this case, pick a jacket that is clean and in good shape. Generally, there will be somewhere to hang it up or you can lay it over the back of a chair.

## INTERVIEW TIPS CHECKLIST

### Before the Interview

- Research the position, organization, and industry
- Anticipate the types of skills/qualities the employer is looking for
  - Identify specific examples for each skill or quality (STAR method)
- Review your resume (anything on it is fair game for the interviewer to ask)
- Practice answering common interview questions including about your weaknesses
- Make sure you are aware of any specific types of interview questions that may be used in your industry of interest and techniques for responding to them (e.g. case interview questions are common in the management consulting industry)
- Anticipate any concerns the employer may have about your qualifications and prepare a strategy for how to address this in the interview
- Prepare a few questions to ask the interviewer
- Get a good night's sleep
- Dress appropriately and look professional (appearance and grooming)
- Bring extra copies of your resume, list of references, a notepad and pen, etc.
- Arrive early
- Be courteous to everyone and aware of your manners from the second you step into the building
- Engage in small talk to build rapport

### During the Interview

- Shake hands firmly
- Smile
- Maintain eye contact with (all) interviewer(s)
- Display positive body language (good posture, no fidgeting)
- Listen attentively to questions and ask for clarification if needed
- Take time to think through a question before answering
- Speak in a clear, concise and confident manner (even pace, vary tone of voice)
- Link your skills and experience to the position and provide relevant examples
- Demonstrate that you've researched the position, organization, and industry
- Convey enthusiasm and interest by asking well-prepared questions
- At the end of the interview, ask about next steps and thank the interviewer(s)

### After the Interview

- Send a thank-you letter or email (opportunity to add/re-emphasize key points) within a reasonable timeframe (ideally within 24 hours after your interview)
- Treat each interview as a learning process
  - What went well?
  - What can you do to improve next time?
  - Note down any questions that you had difficulty with
- Consider following up if you don't hear back in the expected timeframe
- If you are not selected, ask politely for feedback from the interviewer